

Diller-Chamberlain Store
726 Main Street
Redwood City
San Mateo County
California

HABS No. CA-2141

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DILLER-CHAMBERLAIN STORE

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Location: 726 Main Street, Redwood City, San Mateo County, California.
Present Owner: Mr. Gong Yuey, San Francisco.
Present Occupant: Quong Lee Laundry.
Significance: The oldest brick commercial building in Redwood City, the Diller-Chamberlain Store once functioned as the social and civic center of the town.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1859. Construction began June 4, 1859, and the store opened for business in July 1859.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

1857 May 13 Deed Book 1, page 140
Mezes and Arguello
to
John Vogan Diller
"parcel in Redwood City bounded on the east or front by Main Street 106 3/12 feet, on the south by James McCrea's lot 144 feet to the creek thence to the middle of the creek. On the west by the creek being part of lots 4 and 6 and all of lot 5" as shown in map on file in Recorder's office. Land was sold for "\$160.00 lawful money."

1887 November 1 Deed Book 43, page 85
John Vogan Diller
to
Philander P. Chamberlain
property "commencing on westernly line of Main Street. . . 136 feet and 3 inches on Main Street. . . right angles to border of Redwood Creek then southernly along center of said creek to a point 120 feet from northernly line of Bridge Street then easternly parallel with northern line of Bridge Street and distant 120 feet therefrom to place of beginning. . . lots 4, 5, 30 feet of lot 3 and 6 feet 3 inches of lot 6. . ."

1950 May 8
Giobatta and Mary Solari
to
Gong Yuey
"Portions of lots 3 and 4 as shown on Main Street lots on the August 1, 1856, map of the town of Mezesville."

4. Builder: Robert Driscoll of San Francisco.
 5. Original plans and construction: The building had two identical fronts, one on Main Street and the other on Redwood Creek in back. There were three round-arched openings separated by pilasters, with the door in the center.
 6. Additions and alterations: The street facade has been altered by filling in the round-arched portions of the windows, changing one of them to a door and converting the other two bays to large show windows. A porch across the front, added after 1867, was removed, probably in the 1930s.
- B. Historical Context: In 1853, John V. Diller built a two-story wooden store on the banks of the creek, behind the present brick building. This wooden store housed the first San Mateo County offices from 1856 to 1858. In 1859 Diller constructed this brick building and operated his general store there.

In 1866, Benjamin F. Cooper became Diller's partner, and the business was operated under the name Diller and Cooper. In 1869 Diller retired, and in 1872 Cooper sold it to William A. Armstrong who with his brother Edmond formed the partnership Armstrong and Company. In 1875, William Koch took over the "Old Pioneer Store," selling a year later to Philander P. Chamberlain and Wilbur J. Wilcox.

P. P. Chamberlain (1840-1928) was a businessman, county official, and civic leader who came to Redwood City in 1868 and worked in the store before buying it. He became sole proprietor in 1883, operating the store until his retirement in 1916. Wells Fargo & Company Express Agency was located here from 1875 to 1911. Chamberlain served as County Treasurer from 1882 to 1925.

The Redwood City Tribune of April 9, 1959, notes: "Chamberlain had a large cast iron safe in the rear of the store close to the cooling waters of a nearby creek in which he, as county treasurer kept county funds..." He is also known to have kept rolls of butter in the cool safe in hot weather. It also recalled that "it was the social center of the town with most activities starting or being completed in the store, with its bins and barrels of dried foods providing continuous snacks for young and old."

In 1918-19, the store served as a classroom for the Redwood City Aviation School. In the 1930s, the building was converted to a laundry.

Prepared by: R. Patrick Christopher
Project Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Brick, 35' (Three-bay front) x 75', one story, flat roof with parapet and denticulated cornice, pilasters across front delineate bays, original round-arched openings now mostly bricked in.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books: San Mateo County Recorder's Office, Hall of Records, Redwood City, California.

B. Old views:

1867 photo, looking north on Main Street, Diller Store without porch (photo from the collection of Mr. Richard Schellens, Redwood City Historian, Redwood City, California).

1878 drawing showing bird's-eye view over original slough, taken from History of San Mateo County by Moore and DePue.

Photo ca. 1895, John P. Issac Collection (copy with San Mateo County Museum), Redwood City, California. East facade of store with porch and neighboring Monogahela Saloon Building.

1908 photo in Olmsted and Watkins, p. 170.

C. Secondary sources:

Century 67, Redwood City Historical Trail, City of Redwood City Publication, 1967.

Cloud, Roy W. History of San Mateo County. Chicago: S. J. Publishing Company, 1928.

Moore and DePue, Illustrated History of San Mateo County. San Francisco, 1878.

Olmsted, Roger, and T. H. Watkins, sponsored by the Junior League of San Francisco, Inc. Here Today. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1968.

Redwood City Tribune, December 7, 1951, April 9, 1959, September 9, 1963.

Regnery, Dorothy F. An Enduring Heritage, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976.

San Mateo Gazette, October 4, 1873.

Stanger, Frank, South From San Francisco. San Mateo County
Historical Association, 1963.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored jointly by the National Park Service and the Junior League of Palo Alto. Recorded under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1974 at the Historic American Buildings Survey field office at the Latham-Hopkins Gatehouse, Menlo Park, California. Project supervisor was Kim Spurgeon (Assistant Professor of Architecture, Kansas State University); the project historian was R. Patrick Christopher (Columbia University); and the student architects were Stephen Farneth (Carnegie Mellon University), Robert Randall (University of Houston), Aino Vieira da Rosa (University of Oregon), and Amy Weinstein (University of Pennsylvania). The written data were edited by Dorothy F. Regnery in San Mateo County in 1975 and by Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian, in February 1983.